

Housing Comprehensive Plan Task Force

Meeting Summary May 16, 2007

Task Force members present: Jim Bellus, John Couchman, Margy Mattlin, Harry Melander, Gaius Nelson, Marilyn Porter, Paul Rebholz, Missy Thompson, Terri Thao, Maureen Warren, Linda White

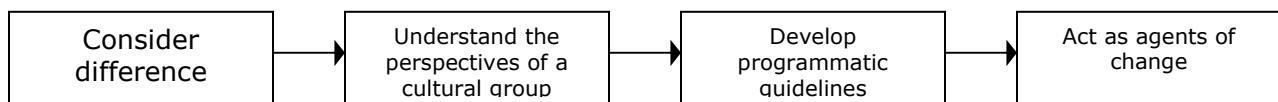
Staff: Luis Pereira, Yang Zhang (PED)

Guests: John Buzza (MICAH), Tasoulla Hadjiyanni (University of Minnesota College of Design), Alicia Huckleby (St. Paul PHA)

The meeting began at 4:05 p.m. Chair Jim Bellus stated that this meeting would be the last Task Force meeting consisting of large presentations about specific housing subtopics, and that the two meetings in June would consist of almost entirely discussions of where/how housing finance should be prioritized. The final two meetings for the Housing Task Force are June 6th and June 20th, at which the group will discuss housing types, housing activities, and affordable housing policy. The Task Force will reconvene in September 2007 to consider a draft plan, as composed by PED staff during July-August 2007.

The first portion of the meeting was a discussion with Dr. Tasoulla Hadjiyanni, professor at the University of Minnesota College of Design. Dr. Hadjiyanni studies and promotes “culturally-sensitive” housing design, which is housing that supports *various* ways of living, and supports a variety of groups’ needs, including those of “new Minnesotans” (mainly immigrants and people of color). She emphasized that it is not to be confused with “culturally-specific” housing (only suitable for one specific group). While on one hand, the Twin Cities are highly attractive to the “creative class,” they lack in terms of “feeling like home,” according to its newer immigrant cultural groups. Housing has important implications for all cultural groups’ mental, physical, emotional, and cultural health. Factors to consider include the groups’ religions, food preparation and food itself, dress codes, and family structures.

While culturally-sensitive housing appears to be focused only on the needs of these cultural groups, it helps the entire region by making it more welcoming, and supporting healthy lifestyles (and indirectly, health care costs). Culturally-sensitive housing can ease families’ adjustment in the US, as well as “enable women to continue to practice their traditions, easing their life, and establishing their role as safe keepers of the home place.” In particular, housing design can help facilitate families eating together, as well as the preparation of traditional foods, important for fighting against obesity and diabetes among youth. A housing study related to the needs of the Ojibwe people found that there was a lack of houses with adequate places to eat, and there was insufficient counter space for food preparation. Another study found that there in many homes, there were insufficient places to study. Dr. Hadjiyanni has studied many groups, including Hmong, Somali, Mexican, and Ojibwe, and is now beginning to study African-Americans.



Source: Hadjiyanni, T. (2005). Culturally-sensitive housing – Considering difference. *Implications*, 3 (1), 1-6.
www.informdesign.umn.edu

Some general “Culturally-Sensitive” Housing guidelines that Dr. Hadjiyanni referred to included:

- Providing for shared spaces. Traditionally for the Hmong, the home is the place for religious ceremonies, as well as eating together after such rituals. Shared space provides for families to cook, and assemble ~200 people to gather and eat. For the Somali, shared spaces provide opportunities for people to pray. This is especially important in the Twin Cities, which do not have many places for women to pray together.
- Education about how a single family home is occupied, and flexibility in allowing single family homes to be adapted. For the Hmong and Somali, cooking in a typical single family house can present problems, such as the sinks being too small for food preparation, and kitchens being open to the rest of the house. In the latter case, open kitchens let traditional food smells permeate the house, and providing for flexibility to close off the kitchen helps prevent this, as well as allows Somali women freedom to cook without their veils when male guests are visiting. The Hmong raise a lot of medicinal plants, which need to be inside during the winter; often they are best in the kitchen (closer to water and more light). For Somalis, Muslim faith requires them to wash their face, ears, hands, and feet prior to praying, 5 times a day. Having a low sink or a bidet in the bathroom helps ease cleaning after bathroom use. Somalis also prefer to have separate gathering areas for women and men. Education is needed with regard to yard maintenance, etc. Housing adaptability can vary in scale and complexity, ranging from adding/taking down a wall in an existing house, to designing such spaces into a new housing design. Training is needed for organizers and tenants
- Health issues. For the Somali and the Ojibwe (Anishinaabe), closed-in spaces are culturally common; among these groups, asthma has skyrocketed. Ensuring sufficient ventilation is necessary, despite such housing traditions.

Challenges to culturally-sensitive housing include 1) Getting people to see the big picture – as a benefit to the TC metro in general, 2) Changing attitudes/understandings about how immigrants adapt: assimilation is no longer as in the past due to the facility of international travel, and the internet. [The “new Minnesotan” is often part of a Diaspora model that asserts that one can be a good citizen and belong to two places/countries.], 3) Balancing a desire for community, while avoiding over-segregation. A reasonable range of housing cluster might be from 2-3 units to 15-20 units. Another key element is the surrounding neighborhood – are their places for gardening, corner stores for culturally-oriented foods to be sold (opportunities for entrepreneurialism) and other service amenities? Culturally-sensitive housing is key to attracting St. Paul’s emerging markets into homeownership.

Some nonprofits have become partners in culturally-sensitive housing construction. EMHI has secured money for Somali housing. Other allies on this are Cultural Brokers (multi-ethnic, but primarily African-American), as well as Model Cities. One example in Minneapolis is by the Powderhorn Residents Group, in which a multifamily building was readapted for Cambodians. It is now occupied mainly by Somalis. The Wilder Foundation manages a few properties like Arlington Gardens, occupied by Hmong elders, and the Elders Lodge, occupied by Native American elders at Ames Lake.

The Task Force moved into a discussion of housing design. While there is currently no citywide infill housing design guidelines, the Task Force was provided those developed by District 6 and Sparc. Other issues related to infill housing design include duplex/triplex conversion guidelines, and the current zoning regulations regarding accessory units on single family lots. Some Task Force members said that at root of the fear of new duplexes and accessory units in largely single family neighborhoods is the lingering bias against renters in peoples’ minds. One task force member said that 95% of Americans have been renters at one point or another. Another said that economic realities—the growing unaffordability of housing, the rising cost of transportation—will push for more units in single family neighborhoods with large lots in the central cities. Another addressed a perception in some single family neighborhoods that many single family homes have been converted to rental units: According to some research, the percent of ownership units in Frogtown, Payne-Phalen, and Dayton’s Bluff has not fallen substantially over time; rather, ownership has varied. What has changed is the color of the renters. Another task force member said that universal design is a good idea.

Next, Luis Pereira of PED presented some definitions and guidelines related to “sustainable” or “green” housing (and building). The State of Minnesota has a definition of “sustainable development,” which task force members found to be overly general. Some passive “green” standards, include (but are not limited to) designing for appropriate density at transit corridors & nodes, building less or more efficiently, including using built-in storage, and building “up” (vertically), not “out.” Other opportunities are taking advantage of solar energy for home temperatures, including: 1) Orienting large windows to the south in northern climates; 2) Limiting west-facing windows to avoid excess summer heat build-up; 3) Maximizing solar light via skylights; 4) Using awnings on all but north side of a home to minimize unwanted summer heat gain; 5) Using shade trees on the east and west sides of a house to minimize summer heat gain. Relating to building more efficiently, a strategy is to build an energy-efficient home envelope by sealing air leaks to stop drafts, adding insulation, and using energy-efficient qualified windows.

While using “green” criteria in designing/building homes, it can add about of 2 - 5 % to the total development first cost, but the annual energy savings can be \$200-\$400 for the homeowner. Such first costs are also recouped within 10 years, which is fairly insignificant time period in the life of a home. There are nearly 50 regional & national green home labeling programs in US. While building green is an environmental issue on its surface, it’s also an equity issue, as while 16 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions are generated from the energy used in homes¹, low income families will spend an average of 17% of their income on energy in 2006.² The City HRA currently requires developers seeking its funds to take advantage of Excel Energy’s Energy Design Assistance Program or the Energy Star Home program as part of the pre-approval process.

Green Communities is a national partnership between Enterprise & the Natural Resources Defense Council, in which the former has committed \$555 million to create 8,500 highly sustainable homes for low-income people, nationwide. Green Communities’ homes have resulted in annual energy savings of \$350 per household, 2,340 fewer pounds of greenhouse gas emitted per household, and 7,000 fewer gallons of water used per household, per year. Minnesota Green Communities is a local partnership involving Enterprise, the Family Housing Fund, and the Greater MN Housing Fund, and it has become the “basis for an ambitious effort to make all the affordable housing in the state sustainable.”³

Green Communities is targeted at developers, and uses standards of affordability for ownership housing at 80% of AMI, and rental housing at 60% of AMI. While none of the state’s 8 pilot projects happened in St. Paul, two projects in the city will meet the criteria in the city: The Winnipeg at Rice/Winnipeg in the North End, and the Village on Rivoli project in Railroad Island on the East Side.

Consistent with Energy Star guidelines, the Green Communities criteria focus on the following elements: 1) An integrated design process, 2) Locations, 3) Site improvements, 3) Water conservation, 4) Energy efficiency, 5) Materials that are beneficial to the environment, 6) Creation of a healthy living environment, and 7) Sustainable operations and maintenance. There are mandatory and optional (credit) criteria. Some of the mandatory criteria are waived for moderate rehab or infill, given that adapting existing homes to green standards can be very costly.

MN Green Communities was recently successful in getting Minnesota Housing to adopt the Green Communities criteria, meaning that any new multifamily development receiving MN Housing financing must build to these criteria. Other green criteria under development are the Green Remodeling and

¹ Energy Star website: http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=new_homes.nh_benefits

² Meg Power, “FY 2006 Energy Bills Forecast: The Impact on Low-Income Consumers.” Energy Star website: http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=new_homes.nh_benefits

³ Proscio, Tony. 2007. “Affordable Housing’s Green Future: Building a Movement for Durable, Healthier, and More Efficient Housing: Lessons from Minnesota and Beyond.” Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. and Green Communities

Green Building Guidelines (Builders' Association of the Twin Cities and the Green Institute), as well as the national LEED-ND criteria, which apply green criteria to a neighborhood scale. The Task Force recognized the importance of all of these guidelines and criteria, but said that the larger principles ought to be emphasized in the Housing Plan: Some of these include the application of "Smart Growth" / "New Urbanist" land development principles; Energy-efficient construction techniques; Waste reduction and recycling during construction; the use of renewable resources and application of energy-efficiency (photovoltaics, energy-efficient lighting & appliances); An emphasis on "Healthy Living" or indoor health via the control of moisture, chemical exposure, radon, pests, ventilation, and airborne pollutants; products and processes that promote the efficient use of water; and the application of sustainable stormwater and water quality management techniques.

Kurt Schultz, sustainability coordinator for PED, explained the Interim Saint Paul PED/HRA Sustainability Policy for development projects that are that are funded, in whole or in part, by PED/HRA. There are 3 types of requirements, based on the scale and type of development project.

- 1) **Large New Construction** – applies to commercial buildings of 15,000 square feet or more, residential buildings of 150,000 square feet or more, or residential buildings with common space of 15,000 square feet or more. The requirement for these projects include that the developer participate in Xcel Energy's Energy Design Assistance Program, and implement energy-saving recommendations, identified either through personalized computer energy modeling, or through a simple review of construction documents by Xcel Energy. While consultation with Xcel is free, the costs of the recommended strategies are paid for by the developer, but they may qualify for Xcel's cash incentives. On average, participants save 30% on annual energy bills compared to code requirements.
- 2) **Small New Construction & Rehabilitation of Residential Buildings** (less than 15,000 sq. ft. of common space) – this projects are required to participate in the Energy Star Homes program (new construction) or the Home Performance with Energy Star program (rehab projects), and receive third-party verification from an accredited organization. The Neighborhood Energy Connection, through its Peak Performance Homes consulting program, certifies consultants who provide developers with specific info about how to increase energy efficiency in their buildings). Typically, it costs the homeowner/developer \$600 for consulting services on a SF detached home, and \$900 is the average added cost of the improvements. Financing, in the form of Energy-Efficient Mortgages, is available, as well as tax breaks, rebates, and other incentives.
- 3) **Development Projects in the District Energy service area** – The developer is required to obtain cost estimates from District Energy and Xcel Energy for the provision of heating and/or cooling services early in the design process.

The above interim policy will be replaced once a final policy has been developed, which is expected in late 2007. PED has a grant request in to MPCA that would be used to hire a consultant to coordinate a new sustainable/green policy for all housing in St. Paul that receives HRA/PED funding, and the expectation is that it would be linked to MN Green Communities, LEED, or other local/national standard.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.